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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SOFIA 000463

SIPDIS

FOR PM/WRA MARK ADAMS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV PREL MARR BU IZ
SUBJECT: ACTION REQUEST: REMEDIATION ASSISTANCE REQUEST FOR
AMMO STORAGE EXPLOSIONS

REF: SOFIA 451

¶1. (U) Summary: The Government of Bulgaria, through its Chief of Defense Zlatan Stoykov, sent a formal request for U.S. equipment to assist in remediation of accidentally exploded ordinance at the Chelopechene Ammunition Storage Facility in Sofia. On 3 July, a series of powerful explosions rocked the city and forced the evacuation of residents within a 6 km radius. Many tons of ammunitions and explosives were destroyed and many more are presumed to be damaged. The Government of Bulgaria has not issued a clear statement on the cause of the incident, the inventory destroyed, or the extent of the damages. Post offered assistance to the Bulgarians immediately after the incident, but only on 9 July received an official request for assistance. Post understands that U.S. European Command (EUCOM) possesses some or all of the assets the GOB is requesting and is standing by to offer assistance, pending State Department approval. Post strongly supports provision of assistance and requests expeditious Departmental approval. Post also requests approval to offer approximately \$230,000 (the unspent portion of Bulgaria's allotted Small Arms/Light Weapons destruction budget) for remediation of the explosion site and destruction of damaged or potentially unstable munitions. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On 9 July, the Defense Attache's Office received an official request from the Chief of Defense, the verbatim text of which is included below:

"A major incident happened in the area of the ammunitions utilization base in the region of Chelopechene near Sofia on 3 July 2008 at 06:30. As a result of that the classic artillery projectiles storages and big amount of explosive blew up.

To liquidate the consequences from this incident, I would like to turn to you with a request for free of charge assistance to the Bulgarian Armed Forces consisting in providing us the following special machinery and equipment:

- ¶11. A large robot for EOD activities;
- ¶12. A small robot for EOD activities;
- ¶13. A thermo vision camera;
- ¶14. a container for transportation of undetonated ammunitions with trotyl (trinitrotoluene) equivalent up to 10kg;
- ¶15. Heavy protective clothing for EOD operator (5 sets)

This special machinery and equipment will contribute to the successful liquidation of the consequences from the incident and will guarantee safe work for the EOD operators.

Yours sincerely,

General Zlatan STOYKOV"

¶13. (U) EUCOM has indicated that it could provide the assets requested, though it prefers to send an initial survey team to evaluate the site before any equipment is delivered. Pending formal Bulgarian approval, this survey team could arrive as soon as 11 July. The Bulgarians have already used U.S. equipment donated under the auspices of DTRA's WMD counter-proliferation training to verify that there is no biological, chemical or nuclear contamination to the site.

¶14. (U) On 30 June, the United States and Bulgaria reached an agreement on the destruction of small arms and light weapons. After Bulgaria decided not to destroy tens of thousands of machine guns originally tapped for destruction, only slightly less than \$70,000 worth of weapons were included in the implementing document (out of an original allocation of \$300,000). Post requests permission to offer some or all of the remaining \$230,000 to the Government of Bulgaria to destroy weapons, ammunition or explosives damaged in the blasts and to destroy other excess weapons, ammunition or equipment from the site determined to be dangerous, unstable or unable to be adequately stored due to damage to the ammo storage facility.

¶15. (U) Comment: A week after the incident, accusations, rumors and conspiracy theories regarding the cause of the explosions at Chelopechene continue to swirl. Amidst the controversy, the government has regrettably put more effort

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in the blame game (with various forces seeking control over the investigation process) than on remediation of the site and prevention of future accidents. The government has been criticized by the media and the public for its slow response, but now that it is asking for our assistance, we strongly believe it is in our interest to aid in any way possible. U.S. assistance on this high-profile issue would be welcomed by the Government of Bulgaria and very popular with the Bulgarian public. The Department's prompt reply concerning permission to provide EUCOM assistance as well as to offer additional SA/LW destruction funds would be greatly appreciated. Email instructions should be sent to Joshua Huck, Kelly Adams-Smith, Col. David Wilmot and LTC Robert Mathers. End Comment.
Karagiannis